

From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

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VOTING MACHINE TEST & BALLOT ACCESS ON SECRETARY OF THE STATE'S 2003 AGENDA

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz wants to see what voters think of electronic voting machines, so she has proposed testing the technology in a few towns during this year's municipal elections. The national "Help America Vote Act" authored by Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd and signed into law by President Bush requires states to update their voting systems by 2006.

"Now is the time to explore new voting technologies as we work toward complying with national election reform," Bysiewicz said. "Connecticut also must be ready and prepared to seize the opportunity when Congress makes funding available to the states."

An electronic voting machine test would be done at no cost to taxpayers as a number of vendors are ready to loan such equipment for use free of charge during the 2003 municipal elections. Bysiewicz added that several towns have already expressed interest in participating in the testing of new voting machines.

In addition, Bysiewicz believes new voting technology would greatly improve ballot access for the state's estimated 400,000 potential voters with disabilities as well as senior citizens and others needing assistance on Election Day.

"New voting technology can help ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded equal opportunity to cast private, independent ballots," said Bysiewicz. "Between 200,000 to 300,000 of Connecticut's citizens with disabilities do not vote. Voter participation in the state could increase significantly through the use of new technology."

To increase competition for elective office, Bysiewicz also submitted bipartisan legislation to move party primary elections from September to June and allow the names of petitioning candidates to be placed on primary ballots for multi-town district offices such as Congress, Legislature and governor.

"It is important to the future of our democracy that we encourage more people to run for elective office and that we provide voters with more choices," Bysiewicz said. "Direct access to primary ballots will offer anyone with a serious interest in seeking public office a real opportunity to run."